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SUBJECT: IRAQI MFA WELCOMES COHEN-GOOGLE DELEGATION

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¶1. (U) Summary: On November 22, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hoshyar Zebari and MFA Senior Policy Advisor Fareed Yasseen met with Google CEO Eric Schmidt, State Department Policy Planning Staff member Jared Cohen, Trident Capital CEO Don Dixon, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Peter Pace, Google consultant Sophie Schmidt, and Embassy Minister Counselor for Public Affairs. The group discussed the potential role of technology in furthering GOI goals, as well as possible ways in which Iraq can better leverage the internet. Both sides welcomed greater collaboration between Iraq and the United States to foster increased innovation and technology adoption. End summary.

MFA EMBRACES GREATER USE OF TECHNOLOGY

¶2. (U) After exchanging greetings with the Cohen-Google delegation and welcoming the group, FM Zebari stressed the value of technology in fostering non-military cooperation between the United States and Iraq. He illustrated Iraq's openness to technological expansion by remarking that Iraq was the first country in the region to introduce television in 1957 and utilize mainframe computers starting in 1964, and that the nation boasts the highest rate of cell phone and internet adoption in the Middle East. FM Zebari commended Google's imaging project with the Iraqi National Museum, and encouraged more partnerships of a similar ilk. In response to a question from Google CEO Eric Schmidt about the GOI's technology needs and priorities, FM Zebari stated that Iraq is attempting to "catch up" with technology after a "painful" period of stringent sanctions beginning in the 1990s. He added that due to restrictions that currently prevent the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Agriculture from engaging in particular types of scientific research, the GOI is striving to leverage technological solutions to enhance training and education for Iraqis as it strives to get out from under Chapter VII status.

¶3. (U) Senior MFA Policy Advisor Fareed Yasseen emphasized the role of technology in institution building, highlighting its role in strengthening security, e-government tools, and the digitalization of documents and archives. Yasseen pointed out that religious and cultural institutions, in addition to government entities, can be "transformed" by technology. Both Yasseen and FM Zebari commented that in the wake of the August 19 bombing that destroyed much of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the MFA was able to more quickly resume operations because all of its important files, archives, and documents had been scanned and saved.

CHARTING A ROAD FORWARD VIA THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

¶4. (U) FM Zebari shared with the Cohen-Google delegation his view that the GOI needs to focus more on national reconciliation efforts, which will take "time, patience, and outreach." He stated that Iraq's upcoming elections will answer "whether we can all live together," but stressed that the USG still has a role to play in assisting Iraq with this

critical, transitional period. "The election is not a magic solution, and there is a long time between now and the end of 2011," he added. When Google CEO Eric Schmidt asked the MFA officials what the most difficult time in their experience in Iraq has been, they recalled the "desperate" period in Iraq in 1988, when more than 100,000 Iraqis disappeared, as well as the period after the first Gulf War. FM Zebari concluded that while conditions are much better now, "serious challenges remain".

Challenges remain".

¶5. (U) Google CEO Eric Schmidt intimated to FM Zebari that GOI efforts to expand Iraq's broadband network infrastructure as widely as possible, particularly in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities, would enable greater innovation and entrepreneurship among the Iraqi people. He suggested that providing increased internet access to city dwellers could facilitate greater levels of discussion among entrepreneurs, and provide citizens the tools to learn about current events and participate in projects like the imaging efforts at the Iraqi National Museum and the creation of the new National Museum website. In response to the FM's comments about reconciliation, Schmidt offered that a possible plan to further GOI goals in this area would be to initiate a program to enable Iraqis who have lost family members in the last 20 years to draft an on-line testimonial, thus providing every Iraqi the chance to make the internet personally meaningful and useful. MFA Senior Policy Advisor Yasseen stated that this effort might be in line with similar initiatives that the GOI and the Memory Foundation have participated in.

¶6. (SBU) S/P Cohen shared that in addition to the group's meetings in Baghdad, the delegation will also visit Ur to

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determine the feasibility of providing imagery of the archaeological sites associated with the Google-imaged artifacts in the Museum. When asked by MFA Senior Policy Advisor Yasseen if Google is accepting interns from Iraq, S/P Cohen elaborated on Secretary Clinton's announcement at the Business and Investment Conference that Iraq is the first country in which the USG is piloting an internship program for international students in collaboration with Google. S/P Cohen thanked FM Zebari on behalf of the delegation and expressed the hope that the Google delegation's visit would pave the way for greater collaboration between the U.S. private sector and Iraqi entities.

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